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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this paper were to understand the responses of veteran teachers to a series of inservice workshops designed to increase their knowledge of multicultural issues and to draw implications for the preservice training of teachers. A literature review provided a framework for discussing: (1) the background of multicultural education; (2) the need for multicultural education; (3) a staff development model for multicultural education; (4) theory to practice; (5) educators' enthusiasm for multicultural education; and (6) some implications for preservice teacher education. Nineteen teachers in a school known for its diverse student population signed up for the inservice program, but only three attended the first session. A questionnaire was sent to the other 16 to determine why they had chosen not to attend. Based on nine responses, it was concluded that it takes time to educate teachers to the true goals and philosophy of multicultural education; and additional time must be spent on orienting teachers as to why this kind of program is necessary. Implications for preservice teacher education suggest that the success of a multicultural awareness dimension depends on the commitment of faculty and students towards clearly understood goals. (Contains 21 references.) (LL)

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Promoting Diversity in Teacher Education

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Are teachers prepared to address the myriad of cultural, social and linguistic differences which describes our diverse student population? What kinds of approaches will help enable new teachers better understand diversity issues? As teacher educators we were interested in these questions as we developed and taught a series of seminars on multicultural education for a group of veteran public school teachers. Additionally, we explored how our experiences might be applied to preservice teacher education.

BACKGROUND OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

A term which is often used in educational circles but seldom understood is "multicultural education". One finds everything from folk dancing to ethnic food fairs lumped under the multicultural appellation.

This apparent lack of shared understanding has led to divisive and sometimes confusing calls for the elimination or infusion of multicultural education in school programs.

One reason for the divergent attitudes surrounding multicultural education is the wide variety of perceptions which exist regarding what that means. Suzuki (1984) writes:

> "many widely differing conceptualizations of multicultural education have been formulated. As a consequence the various programs in the field often appear to have conflicting purposes and priorities. Many educators have come to view multicultural education as ill defined.

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lacking in substance, and just another educational fad."

Multicultural education, which employs principles of "multiculturalism" should not be confused with the more mendacious notion of "political correctness" which demands obedience to a narrowly defined set of political opinions to which one is compelled to subscribe. Supporters call multicultural education the key to helping teachers foster "the intellectual, social, and personal development of our students to their highest potential" (Bennett p. 14).

Detractors warn that multicultural principles will encourage separatist tendencies which if taken to their extremes will result in "the fragmentation, resegregation and tribalization of American life" (Schlesinger p. 18).

Sleeter (1992) traces the origins of multicultural education to the racial debates and protests of the 1960's when multicultural education was linked with social movements outside education. The political climate of the late 1960's and early 1970's gave support to a variety of materials and practices which advanced until a conservative backlash began in the late 1970's.

Bennett (1990) explains that a comprehensive definition of multicultural education must include four distinct but overlapping aspects: 1) The movement toward achieving equality and equity among all children, 2) The curriculum approach which develops knowledge of cultural differences and contributions of various groups, 3) The effort to show cultural empathy and to negotiate cultural diversity, and 4) The commitment to combat

racism and discrimination.

Hernandez (1989) describes multicultural education as a perspective which recognizes a) the political, social, and economic realities that individuals experience in human encounters, and b) the importance of culture, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status and exceptionalities in the educational process. (p. 4)

Perhaps most concisely, multicultural education means understanding the social and cultural factors which influence teaching and learning and addresses these issues to promote higher achievement and positive social, personal, and societal development. Effective multicultural education does not embody the divisive elements Schlesinger describes, but rather is a process which allows diversity to be a source of educational equity and growth.

THE NEED FOR MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

As teacher educators, we explored how practicing teachers understand and respond to multicultural education. We hoped to apply this knowledge to the training of student teachers.

The way we teach principles and practices multicultural education to preservice teachers, may be a crucial factor in helping diverse student populations succeed in school.

Teacher education programs are closely involved with the

concerns of multicultural education. Statistics indicate that 38% of the total public school population will be composed of minority students in the year 2010 (Bennett, 1990). These statistics raise serious questions regarding maintaining the status quo in regard to what has traditionally been a curriculum and set of expectations which address a homogeneous white European population. Cummins (1986, 1989) suggests that schools are failing to successfully educate many minority students because the relationship between schools and minority communities have not addressed the needs and backgrounds of minorities. He suggests that schools redefine the way teachers interact with their students and the communities from which these students come.

We know that teachers' perceptions and beliefs about diverse student populations impact on their classroom behavior (Grant, 1985). Research literature shows a high correlation between successful academic performance of minority students and teachers' attitudes and beliefs, knowledge of cultures and application of cultural information (Sleeter & Grant, 1988; Banks, 1988; Gollnick & Chinn, 1986). These findings suggest that a model for integrating multicultural education throughout the school curriculum must include not only knowledge of cultural diversity and teaching methodology, but also growth in cultural sensitivity and the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to alter relationships between students and school personnel.

We believe that teachers are in a unique position to help students learn to respect the differences they see in one another, to achieve regardless of their own background, and ultimately to bring positive change to society at large.

A STAFF DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

We began our project understanding that experienced teachers recognize the increasing need to know how to work with diverse student populations. We saw a need and an opportunity to provide inservice teachers with ways to increase their knowledge of multicultural issues and in turn better serve the diverse student populations they teach.

We share Sleeter and Grant's (1988) understanding of multicultural education as a means to reconstruct society through promotion of structural equality and cultural pluralism in school practices.

In creating a staff development program for multicultural education we drew on studies such as Gay (1977) and others who recommend that to begin the process of change, teachers must begin to understand their own background, values, and views of cultural diversity. This should then expand into learning about cultural patterns, communication and learning styles, and cross cultural interactions and ultimately curriculum development, instruction and support services.

Sleeter (1992) discusses additional elements of staff

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development such as sensitivity toward multicultural populations, skill in working with parents, knowledge of second language acquisition, discipline techniques with prevention and problem resolution (p. 34). Active involvement of teachers in planning inservices and support from the administration are also cited as important factors in making the process effective. Sleeter (1992) states "multicultural education involves awareness of broader social and educational issues" such as the need to restructure schools to deal with grouping patterns which perpetuate inequity, relationships between schools and communities, language programs, and staffing patterns (p. 39).

THEORY TO PRACTICE

In designing a model for inservice teachers, we planned 5 intensive seminar/workshops over a four month period. Through our workshop, classroom teachers would develop strategies and resources to implement their own curriculum reflective of a multicultural approach. We hoped to achieve the following goals:

1. To provide opportunities for teachers to learn about a variety of cultural groups.
2. To provide opportunities for teachers to learn about the educational and social needs of various cultural groups.
3. To provide opportunities for teachers to explore attitudes and feelings about their own cultural background and that of others.
4. To provide opportunities for teachers to learn about multicultural resources in the local and broader community.
5. To teach and model a variety of instructional strategies for implementing multicultural educational goals.
6. To foster an environment which encourages mutual support among teachers in their efforts to create a positive multicultural climate in their classrooms.

We designed the following program:

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Phase I: Orientation/Overview/Needs Assessment/Learning Sessions 4 months

Phase II: Implementation Support 4 months

Phase III: Focused Reflection Revisions

Phase IV: Ongoing support system Follow-up in fall

Phase V: Evaluation of Effectiveness

DO EDUCATORS LACK ENTHUSIASM FOR MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION?

As we planned our staff development program we chose a school known for its diverse student population. Currently ESL classes are held for 23 different language groups within the school. We attended two faculty meetings to present an overview of the program. Following our overview, a total of 19 teachers signed up for the program. We sent each of these 19 teachers a notice of when and where the first meeting would be held.

When we came to the school for the first session, only three teachers actually attended the program. We were unable to explain why the attendance was so low. Were communications inadequate? Had interest dissipated? We proceeded with the course for the three attendees but sought to discover why the other 16 had opted out.

The next day, the principal informed us that several teachers had forgotten and others had schedule conflicts. This was curious since our original sign-up sheet asked teachers to list the times they could not attend. The time we chose seemed to be good for nearly everyone.

We sent questionnaires to the 16 teachers who had not

attended. The questionnaire had three questions. It asked why they had chosen not to attend, what could have been done differently to have resulted in their attending, and if they are still interested in attending a class on this subject.

We received nine responses. From these respondents we learned that one of the teachers became involved in a master's program, one misunderstood the location, one didn't come because many of her colleagues didn't, and six developed scheduling problems (carpools, babysitters, etc.).

As a result of the questionnaire and informal discussion with the teachers we concluded the following:

1. Many teachers have commitments which preclude them from participating in programs for professional advancement outside normal school hours.

2. Some teachers do not see multicultural education as a priority. After initial enthusiasm by many interest quickly waned.

3. While the principal at this school supported our efforts to offer this program after school hours, it is more probable that teachers will take a class like this either as part of a degree program or during the school day. This of course would create many needs such as hiring substitutes which would necessitate financial support.

4. Additional time spent on orienting the teachers as to why this kind of program is important is probably needed. Past perceptions regarding multicultural education may include distortions, ambiguities, or misunderstandings. It takes time to educate teachers as to the true goals and philosophy of multicultural education.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRESERVICE EDUCATION

It is only with greater understanding that demand for

professional growth in multi-cultural educational awareness will appear. When teachers and principals view multicultural education as an integral part of school improvement models staff development will be desired and better attended.

As teachers find themselves increasingly asked to address multicultural needs they will need additional training. Multicultural education programs need to be well conceived and presented, relevant to the needs of the staff and school, and seen as an important step towards school improvement. Timing is also a key to a successful program. In order to reach large numbers of teachers perhaps time needs to be allotted during the school day for such programming. This requires additional expense for budgets which are already stretched thin.

Preservice education programs have the advantage of addressing an audience which is required to participate in college mandated classes and seminars. The success of a multicultural awareness dimension in teacher preparation depends on the commitment of faculty and students towards clearly understood goals. Issues such as appreciation of difference and combatting racism are deep social issues which are best addressed in a developmental comprehensive manner. If treated as a quick "add on" or simplistic recipe style approach, the results could be large numbers of future teachers who quietly "tune out".

Staff development programs in multicultural education have barely begun to scratch the surface in addressing the global changes in equity issues towards which it strives. Each step

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brings us closer to helping schools grow and change in positive directions.

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